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ABSTRACT

GRADUATE SCHOOLS FACE A HOST OF PROBLEMS WHICH CAN BE SUMMARIZED IN THE SINGLE QUESTION: WHAT WILL BE THE IMPACT OF THE CHANGES TAKING PLACE IN UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION ON GRADUATE EDUCATION? THE NEW GENERATION OF UNDERGRADUATES WILL NOT BE CONTENT TO ACCEPT WITHOUT QUESTION THE WAYS AND MODES OF TRADITIONAL GRADUATE EDUCATION. NEW ANSWERS MUST BE FOUND TO SUCH ISSUES AS: (1) EFFECTIVELY MEETING THE PREDOMINANTLY TEACHING NEEDS OF THE TWO AND FOUR YEAR COLLEGES AND THE UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS; (2) LIMITING RESEARCH IN THE NAME OF HIGHER SOCIAL GOALS; AND (3) INVOLVING THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN THE COMMUNITY AND IN THE SOLUTION OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS. THE FIRST PROBLEM COULD BE MET BY ELIMINATING THE NEED FOR A DISSERTATION FROM THE PHD DEGREE AND SUBSTITUTING TWO YEARS OF TEACHING EXPERIENCE IN A TWO OR FOUR YEAR COLLEGE. THE QUESTION OF RESEARCH, ESPECIALLY WAR RELATED RESEARCH, AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR MANKIND IS A HIGHLY COMPLEX ONE. IF THE RESEARCH UNDER CONSIDERATION IMPERILS THE UNIVERSITY AS A CENTER OF HUMANE LEARNING, SUCH RESEARCH SHOULD BE STOPPED. THE UNIVERSITY HAS ALWAYS BEEN A CREATURE OF AND RESPONSIVE TO THE DOMINANT FORCES OF SOCIETY. IT HAS NOW THE RESPONSIBILITY TO HELP REALIZE THE PROMISES INHERENT IN OUR SOCIETY TO ALL MEMBERS OF THAT SOCIETY EQUALLY. (AF)

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Herbert Weisinger
October 21, 1969

Weisinger 1

State Univ. of N.Y.
A Reassessment of the Function of Graduate Education

As some of you may know, I am but a sophomore graduate dean, and, like most sophomores, still somewhat surprised that I survived my freshman year. And to those who knew Stony Brook last year, it was hardly the year for calm and leisurely initiation into the art and mystery of administration. Remembering my own graduate school days, I had always thought that the occupation of a graduate dean, chosen more for his academic demeanor than for any other qualifications, was to give learned and dignified speeches on behalf of God, home, mother, and higher education. Altizer, TV, the pill, Berkeley, and a total lack of invitations to talk soon combined to dispel that quaint illusion while sit-ins, police busts, mid-night calls, emergency meetings, and the like made it unmistakably clear to me that the graduate school no longer floated in an isolated scholarly empyrean far above the mundane and tumultuous world of undergraduate life but was now permanently a part of it, as much affected by what disturbed undergraduates and no less responsive.

But again like most sophomores, the very fact of survival has given me the courage to look about, to take stock of the situation, and even to hope, albeit faintly, that I can make it for another year. I am afraid that the view is not encouraging; I see far more problems than I see solutions. The other day, in a few moments between meetings-and the subject of meetings in academic life is worth a book in itself, but a book written by Nathanael West-I was able to jot down a list of thirty problems facing the Graduate School at Stony Brook. I know that a new institution must of necessity be beset by many more perplexities than a school which is long established and smoothly functioning but of the thirty problems I listed, I know from what I read that most are as much applicable to established as to new institutions; substantially, most graduate schools old or new, large or small, religious or secular, private or public, and regardless of region, share the same burdens.

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I will not bore you with my list but I would like first, to mention a few of those which seem to me most representative; second, to suggest some tentative approaches to them which, I fear, may be as controversial as the problems themselves; and finally, to show that these problems, diverse as they may be, are but parts of a larger, single historical movement.

I would summarize the situation which faces higher education by this one question: What will be the impact of all the changes which are taking place in undergraduate education on graduate education? For you must surely realize that once the new generation of undergraduates, and not only those who are directly radicalized but those many more who have experienced disillusion with undergraduate education and who face the world outside the university with distrust and even cynicism, once this generation begins to knock on the doors of the graduate schools-and admitted they will be because there is no doubt of their intellectual capacity-they will not be content to accept without question the ways and modes of graduate education which have become traditional with us. And they will be actively and properly encouraged in their questioning by the younger members of the faculty whose identification is far more with students that with institutions. This is a factor which is quite new and one whose effects are far from being either recognized or realized.

Let me select, out of my list, those problems I see as of greatest concern to school. What will happen to the powerful professional orientation of the graduate schools? How can this bent be modified and liberalized without loss of professional competence? How do we develop interdisciplinary programs, for which there is such great demand on the undergraduate level, on the graduate level? How will the tightening of the job market affect enrollment and placement? How can we support graduate students in the face of declining support both from Washington and from the states and in view of the ever rising cost of living, and often in communities which

are increasingly antagonistic to having universities in their midst? How can we deal with the effects of a discriminatory and arbitrary draft law and its maddening procedures? What is the educational and professional significance of the shift in interest in disciplines, that is, away from the physical sciences and in the direction of the humanities and social sciences? If the Berkeley model of faculty, facilities, and student ratios to serve multi-purpose professional ends is no longer viable, what do we put in its place? To what extent should graduate students participate in the making of decisions which affect them? How well are we preparing teaching assistants to teach undergraduates and for the teaching profession in general? How well are we meeting the predominantly teaching needs of the two and four year colleges, and our own undergraduate schools? To what extent should research be limited in the name of higher social goals? How far should the graduate school become involved in the community and in the solution to social problems?

I think I have raised enough problems to last a lifetime; only nowadays lifetimes are condensed into months, and often we must make decisions of the gravest importance in the worst of circumstances. Let me, in the interests of your time and sanity, and my own inability, deal with but the last three of the questions I have just raised.

The spectacular growth of the two-and four-year colleges has created the need for teachers who combine professional competence with teaching interests but who neither desire nor are required to pursue research as a condition of their employment. These schools require teachers in ever increasing numbers whose preparation is considerably beyond the M.A. level but who, at the same time, are not prepared for the rigors of professional specialization.

The need for such teachers affects the universities as much, though less noticeably. For one thing, more and more students will be going on to the universities from the community colleges for their junior and senior years, and then possibly to graduate

school; the preparation of these students must therefore be of direct concern to the universities. Moreover, extensive and fundamental changes in undergraduate curricula within the universities make it inevitable that the graduate schools recognize that these changes will have an equal impact on their own curricula. On the one hand, undergraduates of the universities will demand persons whose primary interest is in undergraduate teaching; on the other hand, undergraduates who are the products of such teaching will, on going on to graduate school, certainly have their effect on the training techniques by which graduate education has so far proceeded.

I have come more and more to the conclusion that the teaching profession on the college level is composed increasingly of teachers primarily concerned with teaching, who have the training and the desire to keep up with the scholarship in their fields to transmit to their students, but who do not themselves want to be research scholars. Yet, given the circumstances which obtain today, such people can earn no more than the M.A. or M.S. degree, with all the stigmata of second-class citizenship which attaches to those degrees, or to any of the other degrees which have been recently manufactured to designate more than the master's but less than the doctor's degree. The result is that neither teaching nor scholarship is served; such teachers acquire the pall of defeat which soon falls on their students even before they set foot in the universities toward which they aspire.

The point comes down to this simple fact: the only degree which counts is the Ph.D. No other degree serves this purpose, that is, the conferring of status as a full-fledged professional teacher. It is therefore my contention that we must award the Ph.D. degree itself to the kinds of teachers I have been talking about for the sake of higher education as a whole: for the teachers, for the students, and for us who will ultimately have these students in our charge both on the undergraduate and

graduate levels. I propose that we grant the Ph.D. to those graduate students who have finished the course work required by their respective departments, who successfully pass the necessary preliminary examinations, and who, instead of writing the dissertation, will teach for two years in a community or four-year college; upon the completion of two years of successful teaching, as attested by the department in which the teaching has been done, the Ph.D. will be awarded.

For those students who wish to teach on the graduate level or who wish to demonstrate professional competence in research, the thesis will be required; upon the successful completion of all the requirements, the Ph.D. in....will be awarded.

I am aware that the charge will be made that the Ph.D. will be diluted as a consequence of this proposal. But the degree is already diluted; many graduate students have neither the inclination nor the ability to do sustained, original research, and their presence in the graduate schools has effectively watered down the Ph.D., no matter how much we pretend that we are still maintaining the high standards of the past. Moreover, I believe the Ph.D. with emphasis on teaching is an honorable and useful degree, designed to serve an honorable and useful purpose. I think we shall be better off by facing up to the realization that we have in the graduate schools a two-track system already: the spread of the post-doctoral in the sciences is one proof, the substitution of a group of essays for a long thesis in the humanities is another, the dropping of required courses is a third, and there are others. That the need is here, there is no doubt; what alone stands in the way of meeting it is the name of the degree.

I turn next to the question of the direction of research, and of war-related research in particular. How one draws the line between the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake and the use to which that knowledge may be put, how one determines whether or not a particular piece of research is war-related in a society as

technologically inter-related and inter-dependent as ours has become are now the crucial social and moral questions of our time. The engine which propels the car which drives me to work may be used to power a truck which brings troops to a front; the principles which enable a plane to fly me to a Miami vacation enable that same plane to carry bombs; the weedkiller which protects the flowers in my garden may be used as a defoliant; the anti-coagulant which I took after my coronary can exterminate animal life. With specific weapons of destruction, there is no problem; research of and development of them have no place in a University. What places us in our dilemma is exemplified by the discovery of a principle of purely theoretical interest which only later on is found useful in a technical application to war-related research in a manner altogether unanticipated by the original investigator. Paul Goodman has posed the problem in his characteristic crusty way: "We try to purge the university of military projects, but students attack the physical research itself that could be abused (as is even bound to be abused), as if science were not necessarily a risky adventure. They don't see that this is a tragic dilemma. They seem quite willing-though battening on them in the United States-to write off Western science and civil law." Milton put it better earlier: "Good and evill we know in the field of this World grow up together almost inseparably: and the knowledge of good is so involv'd and interwoven with the knowledge of evill, and in so many cunning resemblances hardly to be discern'd, that those confused seeds which were imposed on Psyche as an incessant labour to cull out, and sort asunder, were not more intermixt. It was from out of the rinde of one apple tasted, that the knowledge of good and evil as two twins cleaving together leapt forth into the World. And perhaps this that doom which Adam fell into of knowing good and evill, that is to say of knowing good by evill."

As teachers and students, we must of necessity be deeply troubled by the social consequences of what men think and do. Seen from this perspective, the problem which confronts us as individuals in society lies not so much in things themselves as in the uses to which men put things, so that the right use of things becomes a responsibility which all of us must bear, immediately as academics, but as well in our larger, and more important, obligations as citizens. The scalpel in the surgeon's hand cuts two ways: it may save a life or it may destroy it, as it did in Belsen and Buchenwald. It is not the scalpel but the hand which holds it which does good or evil, and we are as much accountable for the direction of that hand as the surgeon himself, if indeed ultimately not more so.

I would propose that we take as our criterion of judgment this question: does what is under consideration imperil the University as a center of humane learning? As faculty and students, we constitute a collegio, a communality, which we ourselves must protect and foster, lest others, without our training, our dedication, and our principles, wrest it from us. And this means abandonment of the laissez-faire attitude as a result of which the researcher has become an entrepreneur whose business address happens to be the university which currently employs him. But the university, whose facilities are being used and whose reputation is at stake, has the right to protect its name. Academic freedom cannot be used as a cloak to conceal activities which are inimical to the humane values which are in the end the only valid justification of the University's existence.

In the light of what I have been saying, the third question answers itself: the university is involved, and has, historically, always been involved in social questions. The problem, therefore, is not, should it be involved, but in what ways and for what purposes? For in the most fundamental sense, the university is, and has always been, a creature of the dominant forces of society, and, as those forces

have themselves progressively widened and deepened socially, broadening from clergy to aristocracy to bourgeois to the classics represented now by the land grant universities, and their needs therefore continuously expanded, so the purposes which the university has been made to serve have been correspondingly widened and expanded. The university turned out theologians when theologians were needed in the middle ages; it provided preachers and teachers when preachers and teachers were needed in eighteenth century America; it supplied administrators of empire when administrators of empire were needed by nineteenth century Britain; and it poured forth professionals and technicians when professionals and technicians were needed for the industrial growth, first, of Germany, then of the United States, and now of the Soviet Union and Japan. In sum, the university is a social institution, supported by society for its own productive purposes.

I have come, in my own way, to the critique of the university and of the graduate schools especially, made by the new left. That the university has been unduly responsive to the needs of the military-industrial complex, there is no doubt. But, at the same time, it has been the technology of modern industrial society, of which the complex is but a part, which has for the first time in the history of human history made it possible to abolish, once and forever, all previous forms of society which have had, each and every one of them, as the necessary condition of their existence, an economy of scarcity, and therefore inevitably a society of man against man. For it is now theoretically possible that each and every individual in this country, and hopefully eventually for all others, can have enough to eat, to live in decent housing, to receive proper medical attention, to obtain useful schooling, to have the means of leisure, to lead a productive life.

The technology is there; it is the means by which the fruits of that technology unequally reach or are prevented from reaching men which is at fault. It is all

very well for a young man of the middle class and above who, by the time he has reached his teens, has driven his own car, bought his own clothes, has his own radio and his own hi-fi, and has had the means to gratify virtually all his desires-it is all very well for him to say that he is now disillusioned with all his gadgets and that therefore no one else has the need to enjoy them. But there are millions in this country and countless millions more in the rest of the world to whom food, clothing, health, education, and work constitute an ideal still to be attained.

To show how that ideal can be made reality without at the same time being forced to continue to pay the price-a price summed up in the Marxian concept of alienation-which technology has so far extracted, is the fundamental social problem above all others which the university and the graduate school must solve. For I do not believe that national commitment is the result of blind chance or the vagaries of history: to put a man on the moon was a deliberate decision; to put heaven on earth should be a decision no less deliberate. For those who think best in political terms, I will put the problem in this way: how can the promises inherent in our society be realized by all the members of that society equally? What must be done to our institutions, first created to serve the needs of a small, essentially rural population, to make them effective instruments of service for masses of men in the confinement of cities? And for those who think best in moral terms, I will rephrase the problem now in this way: how do millions of men learn to relate to each other and to enjoy the benefits of the machine without becoming slaves to it; how can millions be brought to respect each other as individuals?

Whether the problem is stated in economic terms, or political, or moral, it remains the same: to make real and living the promise of what we now know can be, and without the price which has been paid before. It is to the solution of this problem, stated in any way we like, that the university and the graduate school must

now address themselves and thus truly to serve society. It is a task which demands that all the disciplines which constitute the university, hitherto compartmentalized intellectually and departmentalized organizationally, come together, and it is not mere coincidence that more and more we are being moved along inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary lines; the pressures which affect society as a whole are no less felt in the university, detached though we like to think of ourselves. Society-even th segments of it most in need-is willing to tolerate that detachment as a sign of our objectivity but it wants results as well, and if we do not provide the solutions, unscrupulous men will, and we will have no excuse.

I would not be misunderstood on this point. I am as aware as anyone on the left or anywheres else that technology is as capable of destroying as it is capable of creating, and that, at this time and in this country, it is destroying more than it is creating. I need not recite the tragic litany of the ills of contemporary industrial society-the poverty, the ill health, the lack of housing, the condition of the cities, the pollution of the environment, the breakdown of transportation, the mismanagement of food distribution, domestic and colonial exploitation, the relentless thrust toward war and more wars, the anomie of the affluent, the despair of the poor-not a day goes by in which yet another fearful facet of imperialism at home and abroad is not brought before our horrified eyes. Yet I do not see how the needs of most men, at home and overseas, and especially in the third world with its ever rising expectations, can be met except through the techniques of modern technology. How else can the masses of men obtain decent-for to speak of minimal is to be insulting-food, housing, clothing, medical care, transportation, education-all the necessities of millions of men now so inter-related in so many countless ways and therefore so dependent on each other? Surely not by a return to cottage craft, and I have noted that some of the most vociferous opponents of technology arrive in the latest

Detroit-made autos at their protest meetings where they shout through battery-powered speakers, sing and play into a maze of advanced electronic apparatus, and memorialize the occasion by use of the most sophisticated cameras.

We who have first enjoyed and only after rejected the fruits of technology cannot say to those who have never tasted them that for their own good they must not reach out for them. Such an attitude smacks of the dictatorship of a self-satisfied and self-righteous minority; worse, it is in effect the abdication of social responsibility. The greater the ravages of technology, the larger the numbers of men whose expectations must be met, the more the needs which have to be satisfied, the more imperative the challenge to the universities and to the graduate schools to resolve the dilemmas which confront society, the greater, in fact, our fortune. "The supreme question before mankind," Walter Lippman wrote on his 80th birthday, "is how men will be able to make themselves willing and able to save themselves." "I shall not live to know the answer," he noted parenthetically and most probably neither will I nor others in this room, but to provide the answer must be the commitment and the opportunity of higher education, and in its success lies our only chance for whatever tiny part of immortality we are likely to get.

Unlike the graduate deans of my graduate school days, I have deliberately refrained from invoking the shibboleths traditional on such occasions-academic freedom, scientific objectivity, freedom of inquiry, the right of dissent, the neutrality of the academy, and the like. This is not because I do not believe in them-I do, deeply, and, in these uncertain times, I had better-but because they are usually intoned as though they were divine decrees handed down at the creation itself by a jovian Board of Trustees for all time to come. The fact is, the concept of academic freedom is of rather recent historical origin, having more to do with the need of the newly emerging professions to protect themselves from political interference than with principle per se. But I prefer to think of academic freedom

as society's half of the bargain which it struck with me when it accepted me as a teacher. But in return for the freedom of thought and expression which I enjoy, at least so far, I have my part of the bargain to fulfill-to deal with the problems which beset society and to provide, without fear or self-interest, the solutions it needs for its survival. Thus, while the university is a part of society and owes its existence and support to it, it can best discharge its responsibilities to society by being free to do what it can do best, to do what no other social institution can do, that is, to subject ideas, and the actions derived from them, to the sharpest critical, scholarly, and dispassionate scrutiny of which it is capable, without concern for mudane consequences on the one hand, and with commitment for enlarging the humanity of man on the other.

I am well aware that the path which I am urging the university and the graduate school to follow is fraught with danger; the experience of social commitment which universities of other times and in other places have had are not calculated to make one sanguine as to the wisdom of this course. We are neither incorruptible nor infallible; we are but men and sometimes pretentious men at that; but if we have any claim on society's support and tolerance, it is in our profession, taken in both senses of the word; what we believe and what we do. We may very well do badly and believe wrongly but in this time and in this place what we cannot do is abdicate the responsibility of profession.

Never before has history moved at so rapid a pace and each succeeding period lives a shorter span than its predecessor. I have been talking in the perspective afforded me by the assumption that we are living at the end of a period, that is, at the close of the Renaissance, and the beginning of a new era, which has yet no name. The components of both the old and the new are still intermingled and what one may take as the throes of death may very well be the struggles of birth. If I

may use a homely image, I would suggest that we think of historical periods as made up of the outstretched fingers of one hand inserted between each other and then abruptly pulled apart. Taking the fingers of the left hand as representing the Renaissance and the fingers of the right hand as representing the era striving to be born, I visualize the time of history in which we now live as the moment when the fingers of the left hand are drawing away from those of the right hand with the swiftest speed.

For if we think of the Renaissance as ultimately the revolutionary force which succeeded in destroying a static, hierarchical, and reactionary mode of thought and behavior and replaced it with one which broke open the way to the comparatively unhindered exercise of individual virtu in private and public life alike, that is, the freedom, if not always the possibility, of the person to move in may directions, economic, social, political, emotional, intellectual, and moral, that is, towards capitalism, a bourgeois form of society, representative government, science, freedom of conscience and belief, faith in the rational, the supremacy of the authentic and self-justifying self, and devotion to the word as the highest form of expression, then I think we must be prepared to admit that that world is now in the process of ending, if it has not already done so.

I need not belabor the evidence for this conclusion for it has been abundantly set forth, by among others, Leonard B. Meyer in "the End of the Renaissance" in The Hudson Review, by Wylie Sypher in Loss of the Self in Modern Literature and Art, and most eloquently by Erich Kahler in The Disintegration of Form in the Arts. One sentence from Jean Dubuffet's lecture, "Anticultural Positions," given at the Arts Club of Chicago and reprinted in the appendix to Professor Sypher's book, sums it all up: "I have the impression that a complete liquidation of all the ways of thinking, whose sum constituted what has been called humanism and has been fundamental

for our culture since the Renaissance, is now taking place, or, at least, is going to take place soon." We who are the daily witness to the power of the collectivity over the individual, of feeling over expression, of touching over speaking, of action over persuasion, of process over structure, of things over thinking, must acknowledge that at the very least the end of the Renaissance is now plain in sight. Incidentally, this is not to be taken as an attack on the golden lads and girls of our time who would deny chimney sweepers; they are, rather, the logically illogical extension of the style of our time and its worst victims.

Let me revert to the image of the inter-locked fingers. The fingers of the Renaissance pulled apart from those of the Middle Ages, the fingers of the Renaissance are now virtually free from the modern; but what the hand into which the fingers of the modern are pushing themselves is I do not know. I do not, however, see this as a cause of despair; it is, in fact, the business of our future.